Laia Foundation Tailoring Project Report 2026

Laia Foundation
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1. The Laia Foundation

Who are we?

Laia Foundation was established in 2009 to work with the most disadvantaged communities of rural Tamil Nadu -Scheduled Castes and Tribes-, with the aim to improve their social and financial development through the implementation of quality education and women's empowerment projects.

We work in collaboration with AID-India (www.aidindia.org) in order to carry out our educational tasks, teachers training and provision of educational materials.

Laia Foundation has its headquarters in Vedanthangal, Chengalpattu District, PIN: 603 314, Tamil Nadu, India.
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Where do we work?

We work across three rural areas of Tamil Nadu: Vedanthangal, Athivakkam and Vandavasi, all situated some 80-100kms southwest of Chennai.

The three areas together comprise a total population of about 10,000 inhabitants. About 90% of the economy is based on subsistence agriculture - mainly rice, pulses, peanuts and sugarcane -, cattle raising - cows, buffaloesand goats - and horticulture - mango and banana. There isn't a great variety of foods available, leading to high levels of malnutrition, particularly among children.

About 70% of the population belongs to Scheduled Castes (Dalit communities) and Scheduled Tribes, some of the most disadvantaged and marginalised communities in India.

What are our projects?

Laia Foundation works within the framework of:

1. Quality Education: our aim is to improve the quality of education in rural areas of Tamil Nadu, with a particular attention to primary education and community involvement.

2. Gender Equality: we support women's active participation in their communities by providing the resources to help them reach financial independence.

What are our projects?

1. Quality Education

- **Tuition Centres:** We run 19 tuition centres in the areas of Vedanthangal, Vandavasi and Athivakkam, in rural Tamil Nadu. The aim of the project is to provide quality education to students from the most disadvantaged communities in order to help them succeed at school.

- **IT Centres:** We also run 2 IT Centres in two different villages of the area of Vedanthangal. They are open Monday to Saturday, for one hour, and the students receive support from a dedicated IT teacher who shows them basic skills, from the use of the mouse and keyboard, to programmes such as Word and Excel, email writing and Internet searching.

- **Nursery School:** Our nursery school also provides quality education at a very low cost. Preschool years are the foundation of all future learning, therefore we place a special focus on the development of the students in their first years of learning.

2. Gender Equality

- **Student Sponsorship Programme:** The aim of this project is to increase female access to further education. Every year, we fund the college fees and transport of 15 students. Alongside the funds, we've also created a Mentoring and Career Guidance scheme to support our students both academically and psychologically.

- **Tailoring Project:** It is aimed at empowering women by training and employing them as tailors - more information below.

2. The Tailoring Project

How it started

In January 2020, in order to increase their family's income and help Laia Foundation, two women from Vedanthangal came up with the idea of using old sarees to make these little bags - called 'surkupeis' in Tamil - which would then be sold in Spain and the UK. This was the beginning of the Tailoring Project. Today, they make lots of other beautiful items.

The Tailoring Project is self-sustainable. For every item we sell, one third pays the tailors' salaries, one third the sewing material and postage, and one third goes to other Laia Foundation's projects.

Objectives

- To equip women from deprived rural areas of Tamil Nadu with pratical sewing skills,
- To provide them with the necessary material and tools to ensure quality of work.
- To increase self-confidence so women feel able and equipped to develop their tailoring careers.
- To encourage women's financial independence.
- To create a culture of fabric recycling and raise awareness on the negative ecological impact of fabric waste.
- To help breach the gender gap.

Beneficiaries, impact and sustainability

The project currently employs four women from Vedanthangal. They belong to the Dalit caste, one of the lowest and most discriminated-against castes in India. While women belonging to higher castes are more likely to reach further education and find employment, Dalit women are still very dependent on their husband's income, don't usually have paid jobs and spend most of their time doing house chores and looking after the family.

Our tailors have reported feeling more in control of their own lives since the project started. Their salary is not only a means to cover family expenses but has also brought them a higher level of independence, the opportunity to socialise with other women and an improved sense of self-worth and confidence.

As explained above, the project is financially self-sustainable due to the distribution of the income generated by the sale of the tailoring items.

In terms of environmental impact, one of the project's main objectives is to reduce fabric waste. The tailors are fully aware of the detrimental impact excess of fabric has on the planet. One of their tasks is to ensure they recycle as much fabric as possible. They mostly use old sarees and other clothes and also ask neighbours and relatives to donate unwanted clothing.

Project needs

The project has been going from strength to strength since its inception. The tailors, who started making only 'surkupeis', are now making different types of bags, aprons, hair bands, fabric bangles and dresses. In 2024, the sales of the tailoring items started to rise, which gave Laia Foundation the opportunity to add the four tailors to their payroll, as opposed to being paid per item made. In 2025, the tailors attended a Laia Foundation funded course in order to develop their skills in dress and pattern making.

At present, the project needs are as follows:

1. Despite the focus on project sustainability, the tailors struggle at times to find reusable fabric. Sometimes this is because they cannot recycle their own fabric anymore as they have run out, or donations from others are low.

2. Inspired by the Tailoring Project, other women in Vedanthangal and nearby villages have asked the Laia Foundation to organise regular sewing courses for women. We have already sourced the trainer and have a space that could fit around 20 sewing machines, however we do not have machines to start the course or the funding to buy them.

Laia Foundation is currently looking for fabric retailers or companies that can donate unused fabric and/or remnants and second-hand sewing machines, so that our Tailoring Project can continue to grow and more and more women in the area benefit and improve their financial status.

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